

ARE PARENTS RESPONSIBLE WHEN CHILDREN GO WRONG?

Updated October 27, 2009 (first published March 3, 2000) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

I received the following e-mail in regard to the article we published entitled "Rearing Spiritual Children" by Pastor Terry Coomer of Indiana (the article is available at the Way of Life web site under the Family section of the End Times Apostasy Database) --

Bro. Cloud, I appreciate your sermon on "Rearing Spiritual Children." What a truly awesome responsibility this is. But being a pastor, I have some questions. What about those godly homes in which there are two or more children, and one goes the way of the world? I believe that it is very possible, and often does happen, that parents have done an excellent job of training all their children, both by word and by godly example, only to have one choose not to live for the Lord. We are certainly not training robots. They have a free will of their own. I believe that Proverbs 22:6 simply means that after a father has done all the right things, and has lived the godly life before his children, and truly shown that he loves them, no matter how far they run they cannot outrun the training that was instilled in them. And further, if there is any hope of their returning to the Lord, it is because the Holy Spirit can use that training that was instilled in them to convict them. Then, of course, this brings up another question. What about pastors/evangelist/missionaries, etc., who fall into sin and ruin their ministries, often after many years of ministry? Are their fathers responsible? No, every person answers to God for his/her own sins, and in spite of the best efforts of many a man, many children have chosen to disregard all they have been taught, and they have chosen to disregard every godly example they have seen, and have gone off into sin. To say that the father is at fault in every single instance seems to provide an excuse for the child which says, "It wasn't my fault." And we know that's not true. I believe that many a godly father has been placed on a needless guilt-trip as a result of interpreting Proverbs 22:6 to mean that it is an iron-clad guarantee that a child won't go the wrong way just because he knows right from wrong, and has seen his father living out a godly life before him. In closing, I do realize that many fathers are falling far short in the area of "Rearing Spiritual Children." God help them to wake up!

REPLY FROM BROTHER CLOUD:

Following is an expanded edition of my reply to this individual (who, as stated, is a pastor):

Hello. That is not my sermon, but I would reply to you as follows.

You made some excellent points and I commend you for the thought that went into your challenge. I believe your statements and concerns can be reconciled somewhat with those of Pastor Coomer, because there is no one single person responsible in the rearing of godly children. I believe there is a three-fold responsibility in training children in Christian homes:

First, there is the responsibility of the parents (Prov. 22:6). That is what Bro. Coomer dealt with in the article "Rearing Spiritual Children."

Second, there is also the responsibility of the church, which is the pillar and ground of the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Christ's Great Commission, which was given to the church through its representatives, the apostles, requires that the churches train God's people "to observe all things" that Christ has taught us in His Word (Matthew 28:19-20). A godly church can strengthen and

reinforce the efforts of the home, just as a worldly church can undermine the home. Likewise a worldly home can undermine the work of a godly church in children's lives. I have seen it both ways. Just as certain families produce godly children, so do certain churches. It is no accident in either case. It amazes me that most churches seem to take no blame for the young people who grow up in them and do not serve the Lord. The same is true for Christian schools. If the parents have total responsibility and the church and school have none, what is the need for the latter?

Finally, there is also the responsibility of the child himself to respond to God and truth. "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right" (Proverbs 20:11). While parents do affect children, it is also true that a child can never stand before God and rightly blame his parents for his rebellion. That is the part you emphasized.

In my research for a book on secular rock music, I have been impressed anew at how dangerous spiritual hypocrisy is in the home. Most of the pioneers of rock & roll grew up in Christian homes of some sort, yet almost to a man their fathers were weak and both the fathers and mothers were hypocrites. In my recent travels, I have been preaching a message called "How to Raise a Rock & Roll Rebel," which came from this research. Some of the chief ingredients of rearing a rebel are as follows: 1. Hypocritical Christianity. (a) Parents who are dominated by the flesh rather than walking in the Spirit. (b) Parents who are consumed by worldly things. 2. Neglectful fathers. 3. Lack of proper child discipline. 4. Unholy associations (public schools, carnal Christian schools, worldly friends, etc.).

The problem is that these are common areas of failure that probably every parent is guilty of at least some time to some degree. It is all too easy to be hypocritical in various ways and to fail to practice exactly what we believe and preach. It is all too easy to walk in the flesh rather than the Spirit in our day-to-day relations in the home. It is all too easy for the father to neglect his responsibility to train up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and, rather, to provoke them to wrath. It is all too easy to allow unholy associations to creep into our children's lives. This can happen with our children's relationships with the wrong kids even in good churches.

I do not therefore agree with you that ANY father can stand back and say he had no responsibility in his child's spiritual apostasy. The Bible's promises are too plain. Proverbs 22:6 is not as vague as you make it out to be. The wording is much more precise than that, and it definitely promises that if the children are trained properly they will not depart from the Lord.

If we look closely enough, we can always find failure. I know that is certainly true in my own life as a father. Much that I preach in regard to the family I have learned in the "school of hard knocks" by my own failures and mistakes.

While I don't believe a father should mope around defeated by his sins and shortcomings, or, as you put it, go on "a guilt trip," I also don't believe he should pretend that he had no responsibility. I believe any parent that is honest can find areas of failure, and it is not unhealthy to face them. There are failures of commission (failing to do some things that we should have done as a parents, in our personal walk with the Lord before the children, in our training of the children, etc.) and failures of omission (i.e., not being Spirit filled in our relationships with our spouses and children, etc.). The solution to spiritual failure and sin in any area is not to ignore it but to face it and confess it and make it right. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

Some common areas of failure are neglecting to spend time with our children to teach them how to know and serve the Lord (it is easier especially for us fathers, it seems, to serve the Lord alone than to serve the Lord with our children); being grouchy with them instead of being Spirit filled; criticizing them more than encouraging them; wives being bossy and non-submissive; neglectful

fathers and mothers who are caught up in their own pursuits; wives of school-age children and young people working out of the home in such a manner that the children are neglected; allowing unwholesome television and movies and video games and music, etc., to influence the family; letting the children develop close relationships with worldly young people; sending the kids to a public school or college or university so that they become influenced by evil (1 Cor. 15:33); allowing the kids to have more personal liberty than they were morally able to handle; staying in a carnal church so that the children are adversely affected, etc.

What parent can look back over his children's lives in the home and not find failings? I have talked with many church leaders about their children who have gone astray, because I have a great interest in that in order to help others and also because I earnestly do not want that to happen in my family, and invariably they have volunteered to me certain specific failings that they were guilty of and that they know has adversely affected their children. My list of common failings as listed above is based partly on things these friends have shared with me with broken and humble hearts, and partly on my own observations and personal failings.

At the same time, every Christian parent can testify that the Lord is very merciful. Praise God, He is "good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psalm 86:5). It is good for fathers and mothers to face their sins and shortcomings in their family relationships. This brings healing and growth on the part of all concerned.

There is no spiritual progress when parents claim that they did everything right and still their children did not serve the Lord. The hardest things I have faced as a Christian have been my responsibilities as a husband and a father. It has made me face things in my life that I probably would not have faced otherwise.

Though very difficult and unpleasant at times, facing sin and spiritual weakness is not unhealthy if it is done properly before the Lord and if it results in spiritual growth.

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